

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY

SOLOMON CASON,

Plaintiff,

v.

HUDSON COUNTY SHERIFF'S,

Defendants.

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Civil No. 10-257 (KSH)

OPINION

APPEARANCES:

SOLOMON CASON, Plaintiff pro se
D-76937
Bergen County Jail
160 S. River Street
Hackensack, New Jersey 07601

HAYDEN, District Judge

Plaintiff, Solomon Cason, a state inmate currently confined at the Bergen County Jail in Hackensack, New Jersey, seeks to bring this action in forma pauperis. Plaintiff submitted his Complaint on January 14, 2010, without paying the filing fee or submitting an application to proceed in forma pauperis ("IFP"). On January 28, 2010, Cason filed a separate civil action, Cason v. Arie Street Police Department, Civil No. 10-497 (KSH), also without paying the filing fee or submitting an IFP application. Accordingly, on February 3, 2010, this Court entered an Order in Civil No. 10-497 (KSH) administratively terminating that case.

Thereafter, in response to the Court's February 3, 2010 Order, Plaintiff submitted a complete IFP application on February 25, 2010, and asked the Court to re-open his case in Civil No. 10-497 (KSH). This Court will accept Plaintiff's IFP application submitted in his later action, Civil No. 10-497 (KSH) at docket entry no. 3, and direct the Clerk of the Court to make a new, separate entry of that IFP application on the docket in this matter. Further, based on his affidavit of indigence and the absence of three qualifying dismissals within 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g), the Court will grant Plaintiff's application to proceed in forma pauperis ("IFP") pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a) (1998) and order the Clerk of the Court to file the Complaint.

At this time, the Court must review the Complaint, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B) and 1915A, to determine whether it should be dismissed as frivolous or malicious, for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or because it seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. For the reasons set forth below, the Court concludes that the Complaint should be dismissed in its entirety.

I. BACKGROUND

Plaintiff, Solomon Cason ("Cason"), brings this civil action, pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983, against the named defendant, Hudson County Sheriff's Department. (Complaint, Caption, ¶¶ 1, 5b). The following factual allegations are taken

from the Complaint, and are accepted for purposes of this screening only. The Court has made no findings as to the veracity of Cason's allegations.

Cason alleges that he was arrested on October 12, 2007, on charges of possession of a weapon. He claims that the officer never found a weapon on or around his person. Cason was detained for nine months before his charges were dismissed. (Compl., ¶ 8). He seeks compensatory damages for reimbursement of the things he lost while confined, namely, his job, car, apartment, schooling, etc.. (Compl., ¶ 9).

II. STANDARDS FOR A SUA SPONTE DISMISSAL

The Prison Litigation Reform Act ("PLRA"), Pub. L. No. 104-134, §§ 801-810, 110 Stat. 1321-66 to 1321-77 (April 26, 1996), requires a district court to review a complaint in a civil action in which a prisoner is proceeding in forma pauperis or seeks redress against a governmental employee or entity. The Court is required to identify cognizable claims and to sua sponte dismiss any claim that is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B) and 1915A. This action is subject to sua sponte screening for dismissal under both 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) and § 1915A.

In determining the sufficiency of a pro se complaint, the Court must be mindful to construe it liberally in favor of the plaintiff. See Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 93-94 (2007) (following Estelle v. Gamble, 429 U.S. 97, 106 (1976) and Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520-21 (1972)). See also United States v. Day, 969 F.2d 39, 42 (3d Cir. 1992). The Court must "accept as true all of the allegations in the complaint and all reasonable inferences that can be drawn therefrom, and view them in the light most favorable to the plaintiff." Morse v. Lower Merion School Dist., 132 F.3d 902, 906 (3d Cir. 1997). The Court need not, however, credit a pro se plaintiff's "bald assertions" or "legal conclusions." Id.

A complaint is frivolous if it "lacks an arguable basis either in law or in fact." Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 325 (1989) (interpreting the predecessor of § 1915(e)(2), the former § 1915(d)). The standard for evaluating whether a complaint is "frivolous" is an objective one. Deutsch v. United States, 67 F.3d 1080, 1086-87 (3d Cir. 1995).

A pro se complaint may be dismissed for failure to state a claim only if it appears "'beyond doubt that the plaintiff can prove no set of facts in support of his claim which would entitle him to relief.'" Haines, 404 U.S. at 521 (quoting Conley v. Gibson, 355 U.S. 41, 45-46 (1957)). See also Erickson, 551 U.S. at 93-94 (In a pro se prisoner civil rights complaint, the Court

reviewed whether the complaint complied with the pleading requirements of Rule 8(a)(2)).

However, recently, the Supreme Court revised this standard for summary dismissal of a Complaint that fails to state a claim in Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 129 S.Ct. 1937 (2009). The issue before the Supreme Court was whether Iqbal's civil rights complaint adequately alleged defendants' personal involvement in discriminatory decisions regarding Iqbal's treatment during detention at the Metropolitan Detention Center which, if true, violated his constitutional rights. Id. The Court examined Rule 8(a)(2) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure which provides that a complaint must contain "a short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief."

Fed.R.Civ.P. 8(a)(2).¹ Citing its recent opinion in Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544 (2007), for the proposition that "[a] pleading that offers 'labels and conclusions' or 'a formulaic recitation of the elements of a cause of action will not do,' "Iqbal, 129 S.Ct. at 1949 (quoting Twombly, 550 U.S. at 555), the Supreme Court identified two working principles underlying the failure to state a claim standard:

¹ Rule 8(d)(1) provides that "[e]ach allegation must be simple, concise, and direct. No technical form is required." Fed.R.Civ.P. 8(d).

First, the tenet that a court must accept as true all of the allegations contained in a complaint is inapplicable to legal conclusions. Threadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action, supported by mere conclusory statements, do not suffice Rule 8 ... does not unlock the doors of discovery for a plaintiff armed with nothing more than conclusions. Second, only a complaint that states a plausible claim for relief survives a motion to dismiss. Determining whether a complaint states a plausible claim for relief will ... be a context-specific task that requires the reviewing court to draw on its judicial experience and common sense. But where the well-pleaded facts do not permit the court to infer more than the mere possibility of misconduct, the complaint has alleged-but it has not "show[n]"-"that the pleader is entitled to relief." Fed. Rule Civ. Proc. 8(a)(2).

Iqbal, 129 S.Ct. at 1949-1950 (citations omitted).

The Court further explained that

a court considering a motion to dismiss can choose to begin by identifying pleadings that, because they are no more than conclusions, are not entitled to the assumption of truth. While legal conclusions can provide the framework of a complaint, they must be supported by factual allegations. When there are well-pleaded factual allegations, a court should assume their veracity and then determine whether they plausibly give rise to an entitlement to relief.

Iqbal, 129 S.Ct. at 1950.

Thus, to prevent a summary dismissal, civil complaints must now allege "sufficient factual matter" to show that a claim is facially plausible. This then "allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged." Id. at 1948. The Supreme Court's ruling in Iqbal emphasizes that a plaintiff must demonstrate that the allegations of his complaint are plausible. Id. at 1949-50; see

also Twombly, 505 U.S. at 555, & n.3; Fowler v. UPMC Shadyside, 578 F.3d 203, 210(3d Cir. 2009).

Consequently, the Third Circuit observed that Iqbal provides the "final nail-in-the-coffin for the 'no set of facts' standard" set forth in Conley v. Gibson, 355 U.S. 41, 45-46 (1957),² that applied to federal complaints before Twombly. Fowler, 578 F.3d at 210. The Third Circuit now requires that a district court must conduct the two-part analysis set forth in Iqbal when presented with a motion to dismiss:

First, the factual and legal elements of a claim should be separated. The District Court must accept all of the complaint's well-pleaded facts as true, but may disregard any legal conclusions. [Iqbal, 129 S.Ct. at 1949-50]. Second, a District Court must then determine whether the facts alleged in the complaint are sufficient to show that the plaintiff has a "plausible claim for relief." [Id.] In other words, a complaint must do more than allege the plaintiff's entitlement to relief. A complaint has to "show" such an entitlement with its facts. See Phillips, 515 F.3d at 234-35. As the Supreme Court instructed in Iqbal, "[w]here the well-pleaded facts do not permit the court to infer more than the mere possibility of misconduct, the complaint has alleged-but it has not 'show [n]'- 'that the pleader is entitled to relief.'" Iqbal, [129 S.Ct. at 1949-50]. This "plausibility" determination will be "a context-specific task that requires the reviewing court to draw on its judicial experience and common sense." Id.

Fowler, 578 F.3d at 210-211.

² In Conley, as stated above, a district court was permitted to summarily dismiss a complaint for failure to state a claim only if "it appear[ed] beyond doubt that the plaintiff can prove no set of facts in support of his claim which would entitle him to relief. Id., 355 U.S. at 45-46. Under this "no set of facts" standard, a complaint could effectively survive a motion to dismiss so long as it contained a bare recitation of the claim's legal elements.

This Court is mindful, however, that the sufficiency of this pro se pleading must be construed liberally in favor of Plaintiff, even after Iqbal. See Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89 (2007). Moreover, a court should not dismiss a complaint with prejudice for failure to state a claim without granting leave to amend, unless it finds bad faith, undue delay, prejudice or futility. See Grayson v. Mayview State Hosp., 293 F.3d 103, 110-111 (3d Cir. 2002); Shane v. Fauver, 213 F.3d 113, 117 (3d Cir. 2000).

III. SECTION 1983 ACTIONS

Plaintiff brings this action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Section 1983 provides in relevant part:

Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State or Territory ... subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States or other person within the jurisdiction thereof to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured in an action at law, suit in equity, or other proper proceeding for redress

Thus, to state a claim for relief under § 1983, a plaintiff must allege, first, the violation of a right secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States and, second, that the alleged deprivation was committed or caused by a person acting under color of state law. West v. Atkins, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988); Piecknick v. Pennsylvania, 36 F.3d 1250, 1255-56 (3d Cir. 1994).

IV. ANALYSIS

Plaintiff asserts a claim of false arrest and imprisonment in violation of his rights under the Fourth Amendment.³

A § 1983 claim for false arrest typically accrues on the date of the plaintiff's arrest. See Montgomery v. De Simone, 159 F.3d 120, 126 (3d Cir. 1998); Rose v. Bartle, 871 F.2d 331, 348-51 (3d Cir. 1989). In this instance, Cason states that he was arrested on or about October 12, 2007. An arrestee can file suit as soon as the allegedly wrongful arrest occurs; the limitations period begins to run, however, only when the allegedly false imprisonment ends, that is, when the arrestee becomes held by legal process, for example, when he is bound over by a magistrate or arraigned on criminal charges. Wallace v. Kato, 549 U.S. 384, 388-90 (2007).

In Wallace, the Supreme Court specifically addressed the timeliness with respect to a false arrest claim, which this Court finds pertinent here. There, the petitioner had been arrested and convicted of murder based upon an unlawfully-obtained confession, but the charges were dropped after appeal. Rejecting

³ The Fourth Amendment provides: "The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized." U.S. Const. amend IV. An arrest and a search violate the Fourth Amendment in the absence of probable cause. See Kalina v. Fletcher, 522 U.S. 118, 130 (1997); Malley v. Briggs, 475 U.S. 335, 345 (1986); Sharrar v. Felsing, 128 F.3d 810, 822-27 (3d Cir.1997).

that petitioner's effort to bring a false arrest claim after the charges were dropped, the Supreme Court held that a cause of action for false arrest and the imprisonment incident to that arrest accrues as soon as the allegedly wrongful arrest occurs and that the limitations period begins to run when that false imprisonment comes to an end, that is, when the victim becomes held pursuant to legal process - "when, for example, he is bound over by a magistrate or arraigned on charges." The Supreme Court explicitly rejected the contention that the cause of action did not accrue until the State dropped its charges against the victim. Wallace, 549 U.S. at 389-92. See also Montgomery v. DeSimone, 159 F.3d 120, 126 (3d Cir. 1998) (claim for false arrest accrues at time of arrest).

Here, as stated above, Cason admits that he was arrested on October 12, 2007. He also concedes that the charges against him were dismissed nine months later. Thus, it is clear that Cason was held pursuant to legal process, and his false imprisonment from the alleged false arrest ended shortly after his arrest on October 12, 2007. According Cason's claim of false arrest accrued at the latest on or about October 31, 2007; and therefore, he had until October 31, 2009 to file his Complaint. This Complaint was received on January 28, 2010, almost three months after the statute of limitations had expired.

A court may dismiss a complaint for failure to state a claim, based on a time-bar, where "the time alleged in the

statement of a claim shows that the cause of action has not been brought within the statute of limitations." Bethel v. Jendoco Construction Corp., 570 F.2d 1168, 1174 (3d Cir. 1978) (citation omitted). Although the statute of limitations is an affirmative defense which may be waived by the defendant, it is appropriate to dismiss sua sponte under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2) a pro se civil rights claim whose untimeliness is apparent from the face of the Complaint. See, e.g., Pino v. Ryan, 49 F.3d 51, 53 (2d Cir. 1995) (holding, under former § 1915(d) in forma pauperis provisions, that sua sponte dismissal prior to service of an untimely claim is appropriate since such a claim "is based on an indisputably meritless legal theory"); Hall v. Geary County Bd. of County Comm'rs, 2001 WL 694082 (10th Cir. June 12, 2001) (unpub.) (applying Pino to current § 1915(e)); Rounds v. Baker, 141 F.3d 1170 (8th Cir. 1998) (unpub.); Johnstone v. United States, 980 F. Supp. 148 (E.D. Pa. 1997) (applying Pino to current § 1915(e)). The requirements of 28 U.S.C. § 1915A (governing civil actions in which a prisoner seeks redress from a governmental entity or officer or employee of a governmental entity) and 42 U.S.C. § 1997e (governing actions brought with respect to prison conditions) that federal courts review and dismiss any complaint that fails to state a claim parallels the provision in 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e).

Federal courts look to state law to determine the limitations period for § 1983 actions. See Wallace, 549 U.S. at

387-88. Civil rights or constitutional tort claims, such as that presented here, are best characterized as personal injury actions and are governed by the applicable state's statute of limitations for personal injury actions. See Wallace, supra; Wilson v. Garcia, 471 U.S. 261, 280 (1985). Accordingly, New Jersey's two-year limitations period on personal injury actions, N.J. Stat. Ann. § 2A:14-2, governs plaintiff's claims. See Montgomery v. DeSimone, 159 F.3d 120, 126 & n.4 (3d Cir. 1998); Cito v. Bridgewater Township Police Dept., 892 F.2d 23, 25 (3d Cir. 1989). Under N.J. Stat. Ann. § 2A:14-2, an action for an injury to the person caused by a wrongful act, neglect, or default must be commenced within two years of accrual of the cause of action. Cito, 892 F.2d at 25; accord Brown v. Foley, 810 F.2d 55, 56 (3d Cir. 1987). Unless their full application would defeat the goals of the federal statute at issue, courts should not unravel states' interrelated limitations provisions regarding tolling, revival, and questions of application. Wilson v. Garcia, 471 U.S. at 269.

Here, Cason had two years from the date his false arrest claim accrued, on or about October 31, 2007, as stated above, to file his Complaint. He did not file this Complaint until January 14, 2010, almost three months after the limitations period on his false arrest claim expired. Therefore, this claim is now time-barred. Cason alleges no facts or extraordinary circumstances that would permit statutory or equitable tolling under either New

Jersey or federal law.⁴ Nor does plaintiff plead ignorance of the law or the fact of his incarceration (neither excuse being sufficient to relax the statute of limitations bar in this

⁴ New Jersey statutes set forth certain bases for "statutory tolling." See, e.g., N.J.S.A. § 2A:14-21 (detailing tolling because of minority or insanity); N.J.S.A. § 2A:14-22 (detailing tolling because of nonresidency of persons liable). New Jersey law permits "equitable tolling" where "the complainant has been induced or tricked by his adversary's misconduct into allowing the filing deadline to pass," or where a plaintiff has "in some extraordinary way" been prevented from asserting his rights, or where a plaintiff has timely asserted his rights mistakenly by either defective pleading or in the wrong forum. See Freeman v. State, 347 N.J. Super. 11, 31 (citations omitted), certif. denied, 172 N.J. 178 (2002). "However, absent a showing of intentional inducement or trickery by a defendant, the doctrine of equitable tolling should be applied sparingly and only in the rare situation where it is demanded by sound legal principles as well as the interests of justice." Id.

When state tolling rules contradict federal law or policy, in certain limited circumstances, federal courts can turn to federal tolling doctrine. See Lake v. Arnold, 232 F.3d 360, 370 (3d Cir. 2000). Under federal law, equitable tolling is appropriate in three general scenarios:

- (1) where a defendant actively misleads a plaintiff with respect to her cause of action; (2) where the plaintiff has been prevented from asserting her claim as a result of other extraordinary circumstances; or
- (3) where the plaintiff asserts her claims in a timely manner but has done so in the wrong forum.

Id. n.9.

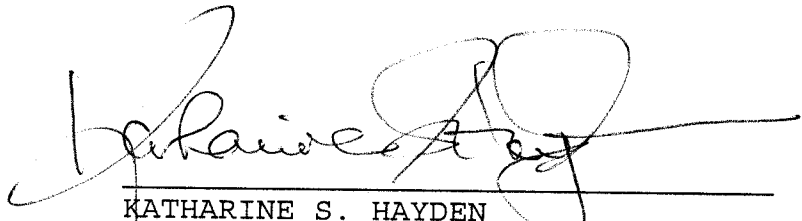
In most cases, "the limitations period begins to run from the time when plaintiff knows or has reason to know of the injury which is the basis of the section 1983 action." Gentry v. Resolution Trust Corp., 937 F.2d 899, 919 (3d Cir. 1991). See also Oshiver v. Levin Fishbein, Sedran & Berman, 38 F.3d 1380, 1385 (3d Cir. 1994) (a claim accrues as soon as the injured party "knew or had reason to know of the injury that constitutes the basis of this action"). "Plaintiff's actual knowledge is irrelevant. Rather, the question is whether the knowledge was known, or through reasonable diligence, knowable. Moreover, the claim accrues upon knowledge of the actual injury, not that the injury constitutes a legal wrong." Fassnacht v. United States, 1996 WL 41621 (E.D. Pa. Feb. 2, 1996) (citing Oshiver, 38 F.3d at 1386).

instance) as the basis for delay in bringing suit. In fact, plaintiff is completely silent with respect to the fact that his false arrest claim has been submitted out of time.

Because plaintiff has not offered any explanation for his lack of diligence in pursuing his claim for more than ten years after it had expired, such omission strongly militates against equitable tolling of the statute of limitations. Therefore, the Court finds that this claim is now time-barred and any false arrest claim must be dismissed with prejudice, in its entirety, as against the defendant, Hudson County Sheriff's Department.

V. CONCLUSION

For the reasons set forth above, the Complaint will be dismissed with prejudice, in its entirety, with respect to the named defendant, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii) and 1915A(b)(1), for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted. An appropriate order follows.


KATHARINE S. HAYDEN
United States District Judge

Dated: 6/29/10